



CATHOLIC COURIER

NEWCOMERS'
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Please look for our New-comer's Guide inside next week's issue of the *Catholic Courier*.

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Helping the unemployed

Church considering means to assist the jobless

Some programs meet needs now

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Martella Smith has hope for a better future.

That hope was born when the Elmira resident discovered the Worker Ownership Resource Center — a joint project of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes offices of social ministry.

Even though she had 15 years of experience in retail sales and a college degree in fashion design and illustrating, Smith had been unable to find work in her field and had been living on public assistance for several years.

Now she dreams of opening a children's consignment shop in the next six to eight months.

"Sometimes people think people who are on welfare are lazy," Smith remarked. "But that's not always the case. Sometimes, there's just no opportunities."

Smith is on the road to creating her own opportunity through the social-ministry program. She is part of the program's first class — which began in November, 1992, with funding from the Campaign for Human Development.

In addition to learning the basics of starting and operating a business — as well as possibly receiving a loan when she is ready to begin her shop — Smith is also offered a chance for support from fellow unemployed people and an opportunity to consider her life and personal finances.

"We try to look at the person, not just the business they are trying to create," observed the program's executive director, George Melas.

The program is not intended for all unemployed people, Melas acknowledged, adding, "There's quite a few other places that provide job training."

Not many of those resources are directly affiliated with the church, however.

Except for the Worker Ownership Resource Center, the diocese and church-related organizations provide few job-training or development programs to help the unemployed.

The Catholic Family Center, for example, offers some programs, especially as part of its refugee resettlement program.



Net Makers for those who will Fish.

St. Joseph's Work Co-operative motto

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Jeannette has been working at the St. Joseph's Work Cooperative in Rochester since mid-October. In addition to preparing bulk mailings, individuals at the cooperative concentrate on contract work — including silk-screening T-shirts.

Rochester's St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, 402 South Ave., created the St. Joseph's Work Cooperative — which is now incorporated separately from the Catholic Worker house. The program offers individuals a chance for contract work, and is concentrating at this point on preparing bulk mailings.

In addition, the diocese allocates Campaign for Human Development funds to help a number of such programs as the worker ownership center and the St. Joseph's cooperative.

Meanwhile, parish food cupboards and clothes closets help to meet some of the emergency needs of the unemployed, and parishes have been known to help members pay their bills.

And the diocese, in conjunction with the New York State Catholic Conference, is lobbying for legislative action for social programs, public assistance and jobs programs.

Otherwise, the local church is only beginning to take an active role in the issue of unemployment, noted Brian Kane, director of social policy for the Catholic Family Center.

"I don't think anybody has developed a plan for addressing the issue," Kane told the *Catholic Courier*.

"I think our response is to create a grass-roots network and to develop ways to respond," Kane continued. "That takes time; it's not something you can do overnight."

Still, some action is being undertaken.

In Seneca County, for example, the diocese has become involved in the Seneca Army Depot situation. The depot — Seneca County's second-largest employer — is scheduled to lay off 500 civilian employees in May. These layoffs have been at the center of negotiations and legal action since last summer.

In response, diocesan officials — including Bishop Matthew H. Clark — and pastors of several parishes that will be affected by the layoffs have met with representatives of Gov. Mario Cuomo's office, local political and business leaders, and depot representatives to formulate economic development plans, noted Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Social Ministry and a participant in some of those meetings.

The Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, meanwhile, will offer counseling support and referrals to benefits programs, Balinsky added.

In spite of these attempts to address the issue, the diocese is still working on a plan to help the unemployed. Continued on page 14